

Milton Keynes Reader Service

Trustees Annual Report

June 2015

Registered Charity No. 1013965

This Annual Report is also available in
Braille or in audio formats on request

Tel: 01908 231123

Email: mkreader@tiscali.co.uk

Website: www.miltonkeynesreaderservice.org.uk

Milton Keynes Reader Service

Annual Report 2014/2015

1 Introduction

The Milton Keynes Reader Service has been running for 26 years. It was originally formed by visually impaired people in the autumn of 1988 as a pilot project under the umbrella of the Milton Keynes Council of Disabled People.

Since 1992 The Reader Service has been a fully independent charity (Registration no.1013965) which provides free services to any person living within the Unitary Authority of Milton Keynes who finds reading or writing difficult due to physical or visual disabilities. We originally offered a reading and writing service to visually impaired people living in their own homes. We have now expanded our services and offer the following three services:

a) Reading and Writing

This is a face-to-face reading and writing service for people in their own homes. This can be anything from reading books, magazines, helping with correspondence, filling in forms, or helping with crosswords or even playing scrabble!

Our service is very flexible because our service users are able to arrange visits from their trained volunteer reader to suit their individual needs. Visits may be on a temporary, occasional or permanent basis. Our aim is to 'match' our volunteer to their service user to enable them to develop a long lasting relationship. Many of our service users enjoy both our reading and facilitation services.

b) Facilitation

We have a growing range of facilitation services which cover the following:

- Our 'shop and see' service; a volunteer will be introduced to a service user and they will make arrangements between them to go shopping. This could be a regular arrangement to cover fortnightly grocery shopping or it could be for pleasure shopping for items such as clothes or presents.
- A service to take service users on 'one off' trips to the theatre, cinema, seminars or educational or cultural activities within Milton Keynes. These have proved to be very popular this year and there is a growing demand for this service.
- We provide volunteers to help with Buck's Vision 'Eye for Art' Group, where sight impaired people meet on the first Thursday of the month to engage in art and craft activities.
- The provision of volunteers to join service users who wish to participate in the Milton Keynes Art Gallery's workshops for sight impaired people. We also help our service users access the audio guided tours of the latest exhibitions at the Gallery.

c) Transcription

We offer a transcription service to enable any of our service users to have paperwork transcribed into large print, onto CD, audio cassette or braille.

2 Service Users

We have had a steady growth of service users with more than 30 new visually impaired people joining us this year. In addition to self-referrals, service users are signposted to us from agencies such as Ascat, Sarc, BucksVision and Age UK. Many of our service users tend to be people over 70 and mainly with Age Related Macular Degeneration, often living alone and isolated within their community. We also provide volunteers for people with severe dyslexia, Cerebral Palsy, Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis and service users that have had strokes. The Reader Service signposts service users to other agencies, for example, Sound News, Bucks Vision clubs and the local MD Group.

3 Volunteers

We could not provide our services without the high quality commitment of our volunteers. We have about 110 people helping us in various ways or in a number of cases, in several capacities. In addition to our three 'core services', volunteers help in the office, record and edit our transcription work, serve on committees, help at coffee mornings, help at social events, attend networking stands and run the 'talks project'. Most of our volunteers get to know about us from the volunteers centre at Community Action, local flyers such as MK Flyer or Phonebox, or networking events. All volunteers are DBS checked and are required to provide 2 references. They are then invited to a full day's training which covers such subjects as eye conditions, how to provide our core services, confidentiality and adults at risk. We held 2 training days this year. We also hold a two hour practical guiding course where volunteers are taught how to guide, including using stairs and escalators and then are paired with a service user to guide visually impaired people around Milton Keynes shopping centre for practice. The co-ordinator will then 'place' the volunteer with a service user, matching them with similar interests or outlooks. She will then monitor them to check that both sides are happy with their 'match'. With the increase in volunteers and service users, we have had a steady increase in placements, over 60 this year plus 'one off' facilitation projects. Together with existing placements, this constitutes at least 7700 hours of time volunteered face to face with service users plus around a further 2350 hours volunteered to help run the charity, which includes management, administration, fundraising and events.

3.1 Repeat DBS checks

In addition to checking all new volunteers, we shall now check our volunteers every 5 years instead of 3 years. This mirrors other charities and is also a cost factor because we have to pay £12.00 per check whereas it was free before.

3.2 Identity Cards

We have decided that we shall issue our volunteers with an identity card. We have sourced a company that will do this and are in the process of collecting photographs of volunteers for the cards. We shall begin to issue them in batches as soon as we receive our new charity number from the Charity Commission when we become a CIO

4 Management

Under its constitution, the Reader Service is a user-led organisation and run by a Management Committee i.e. Trustees, whose members serve on an annual basis and are volunteers. Five user representatives (including the Chairperson) and four volunteers are elected annually at the AGM. Further committee members can be co-opted as required. No remuneration is paid to any Trustee in relation to their duties as Trustees during the year.

4.1 Management Committee Members 2013/2014

- **User Representatives**

Paula Suchy MBE (Chairperson)
Michael Baldry (Vice Chairperson)
Paula Varey (Walnut Tree Community Shop representative)
Caroline Pearson
Jeff Bashton (Talks Project)

- **Volunteer Representatives**

Philip Ward (Chairperson – Development Committee)
Lynn Bovis (Secretary)
Rose Haigh
James Clifton

- **Co-opted**
Mark Lawrence
- **Treasurer**
Stephen Harrison

The work of the Reader Service is conducted by its only employee, a part-time co-ordinator.

4.2 Chairperson

Our Chairperson, Paula Suchy received an MBE for services to the blind in December 2013. She has been involved with the Reader Service since its foundation as both Chairperson over several years and the main fundraiser. She also uses the service with a reader and shopper. Her energies have helped to keep the service moving forward.

5 Sub-Committees

5.1 Development Committee

The Development Committee meets several times a year. The main focus of work this year has been applying to the Charity Commission to change the Reader Service into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

5.2 Events Committee

We set up a committee to help with the smooth running of all our events celebrating our 25th year. We decided to continue this committee and meet to plan each event that we hold.

5.3 Fundraising Committee

We have formed a new committee to explore ways of raising funds through grant applications and applying to companies based in Milton Keynes who may have a corporate social responsibility programme.

5.4 Talks Project

We regularly give talks to inform groups and organisations about our services. This is coordinated by a team of three people, who organise a group of service users and volunteers that are trained to give presentations. The talk covers general information about MKRS plus the personal experiences of being involved with the service both from the service user and volunteer.

6 Finances

6.1 Summary

Our finances are healthier than in 2013–14. We achieved a surplus of just over £4,500 (compared with a surplus of £1,700 last year). This was despite a reduced cash grant from Milton Keynes Council of almost £4,000 in the financial year which was the result of the timing of payments rather than any actual reduction in financial support. In line with the Management Committee's policy, we continue to have enough funds to run the charity for a year without any sources of income.

6.2 Funding

Approximately one third of our income this year came from two grants from Milton Keynes Council for which we are extremely grateful. Our performance in securing other sources of funding reduced the proportion of our funding which is represented in the Council's grant. However, some of these funds are 'one offs' such as in memoriam donations and match funding from localgiving.com which cannot be guaranteed in the future. We also continue to benefit from the generosity of over half our volunteers who do not claim expenses. If they did, we estimate that the charity would have run at a deficit this year. The funding we receive from other sources includes:

- **Walnut Tree Community Shop**

We are one of the beneficiaries of the profits from this shop. We received a total of £7500 in this financial year. This continues to be a vital source of income for us.

- **Community Foundation**

The Reader Service once again participated in the MK Community Foundation's Annual 50/50 raffle, which is run with Volkswagen and Centre MK. We were given three slots to sell tickets and also sold them at our own events, we raised £277.50

Over the past years we have had several grants from Community Foundation. Last financial year they awarded us £800 to take our members to the pantomime. We used half of the money for this and in June we took a group of service users, facilitated by volunteers to see "West Side Story" which included a touch tour and audio description.

- **Funding Cuts and Council Campaign**

Following Milton Keynes Council proposed budget cuts, we were informed that our funding would cease.

We immediately commenced a campaign to support our cause emphasising the devastating effect it would have on the majority of our service users. Our Chairperson wrote to members of the Council and our local MPs, Mark Lancaster and Ian Stewart on the charity's behalf. We also wrote to all our service users and volunteers asking them to lobby their local councillor. To facilitate this, we asked our volunteers to help their service users write to their local councillor and MP explaining how beneficial our services are to them. We aimed to write to every local councillor within Milton Keynes. Our campaign was very well supported and Councillor Nigel Long announced at the Council's Budget Review Group Meeting on 6 January that our grants would be reinstated for in full 2015/16. We do not know about further years.

6.3 Transcription work

Apart from providing free transcription to our service users, audio transcription continues to play an important part in funding our service. For a small charge, we transcribe onto CD or audio tape work for other charities which has included regular transcription of minutes onto audio tape for Milton Keynes Moles, transcription on to CD for MK Disability Advisory Group (DAG) and for Sensory Services.

6.3.1 Commercial Transcription Work

We have transcribed the theatre brochures for Aylesbury, Milton Keynes and Northampton and Derngate theatres. A volunteer edits the 'proof' of the brochure and we have a team of volunteers who help with the recording on to CD for each theatre. We also have a volunteer who is an IT expert and deals with the technical problems that we may face.

6.3.2 Christmas Display

We recorded an audio description and commentary about the Christmas display in Middleton Hall and all the other Christmas activities that were taking place in the Centre:MK. The recording is then distributed via Sound News, the local talking newspaper to approximately 200 people. It can also be accessed via the Centre:MK's website. We also produced braille descriptions for all the major stands within the display.

6.4 Fund Raising

- **Flag Days**

We had two flag days at Asda which raised a total of £625.00 and also took part in their token scheme which raised a further £50.00

- **Donations**

We continue to receive donations throughout the year.

- **LocalGiving.Com**

We continue to subscribe to this website which enables charities to promote their organisation in order for people to donate money. We can also automatically receive gift aid on most donations. Milton Keynes Community Foundation, at various times of the year, offers to 'match' donations. This year we have been able to raise just over £2200 on top of the original donations by taking part in their match funding campaigns.

- **Service User Subscriptions**

The annual voluntary subscription is £20 for each service received by the service user. Many of our service users also gift aid their donation. This year we raised just over £1000. In addition, other service users made voluntary donations rather than subscriptions. The Management Committee has decided in future to invite service users to make voluntary donations rather than pay a voluntary subscription. This will remove any ambiguity as to whether Gift Aid may be claimed on such payments made by those who are UK taxpayers.

- **Legacies**

Sadly 10 of our service users passed away this year, most funerals have been attended by a representative of the Reader Service. Some of the families have kindly asked that instead of flowers, donations be given to the Reader Service. We have received just over £1340.

- **Fundraising Events**

We held a quiz night and auction of promises which raised just over £900 and our Chairperson and her volunteer took part in a sponsored swim raising just over £500. Both events were very well supported.

6.5 Expenditure

Our expenditure was broadly in line with the previous financial year. Overall costs were 7% higher, caused principally by implementing a pay award for the Co-ordinator which maintains the link between her pay and local authority staff pay scales and higher volunteer expenses reflecting increased support to service users. The introduction of new accounting software provided the opportunity to alter some categories of expenditure so comparison of expenditure in certain categories in the previous finance year is not meaningful.

We have continued to benefit from small employers not having pay employer National Insurance contributions which saved us almost £890.

7 Meetings

7.1 Support Meetings

We hold an annual support meeting for our volunteers every May. This gives us a chance to thank our volunteers over coffee and cake for all their hard work and dedication and update them with any news. This year Alison Carlton from the Centre for Integrated Living gave us an interesting and informative talk about their work.

We also had a coffee morning for all our service users and volunteers in June, which included our AGM and Extra Ordinary General Meeting at the beginning of the morning. We had a good attendance of over 70 people.

In October we had a coffee afternoon for volunteers and services users, Bucks Vision opened the Resource Room and we also had various pieces of technical equipment on display. This proved to be very popular.

Our final support meeting for this financial year was a coffee morning in February with an attendance of over 100 people. Mark Lancaster MP joined us and gave a supportive speech regarding our funding. Anne Shepherd from CLM Fleet Management kindly presented us with a cheque for money raised by their raffle. The ladies from Bucks Vision Eye for Art joined us, selling their scarves and bracelets; they raised £151 to help with the running costs of their group.

The cost of all our events is covered by raffles and donations. One of our volunteers regularly makes craft items to be sold at the events and donates all the money she raises.

7.2 Coffee and Chat

We run two residential home coffee mornings, Lovat Fields Extracare Village meets every fortnight and Shenley Wood Extracare Village meets every month. These are run by Reader Service volunteers for anyone who is sight impaired and a resident of these homes. The residents are kept updated about activities within their home and about other events run by sight impaired organisations. These mornings have proved to be very popular and they are especially a good way for new sight impaired residents to find out about services and other agencies which may help them whilst also forming new friendships.

8 Publicity and Information

- **Newsletters**

We produce two newsletters per year which are posted to all our service users and emailed to our volunteers. Our co-ordinator also sends an 'update' leaflet which is emailed to our volunteers detailing latest events and news, volunteers are requested to read the contents to their service users. We try to keep our service users informed about all our activities.

- **Website**

Our website (<http://www.miltonkeynesreaderservice.org.uk>) has been running for 2 years and we are constantly making improvements. We keep it up to date with information and photographs. We have found that potential volunteers often use it as a first source of information about volunteering with us. We also publish items on our facebook page. (<https://www.facebook.com/mkreaderservice>).

- **Stands and Events**

We have attended many events this year in order to publicise our services, to inform potential volunteers about the Reader Service and to offer our help to further service users.

Some of the events we have attended are:

- HealthWatch2 Event
- Shenley Wood Health & Well Being Day
- Woughton Advice Centre Volunteering Day
- Visual Feast (Wiltshire Farm Foods and Bucks Vision)
- Sarc Open Day
- Older People's Day
- Various Community Action networking events

- **Leaflets, Posters and Publicity**

Following redesigning our leaflets last year, we are now updating all our paperwork with our new logo. We appear regularly in MK Flyer, advertising for volunteers, have an article due to be published in MK Pulse and have posters on 12 Parish Council boards.

9 Survey

We conducted a survey for both our service users and volunteers covering topics such as support meetings, newsletters, what they like about the service and any improvements that we could make. We had a very positive outcome and have taken on board some new ideas.

10 Our Thanks

We are grateful to all our providers of income. Our services are provided by our volunteers without which our organisation would not survive and to whom, on behalf of our service users, we offer our wholehearted thanks.